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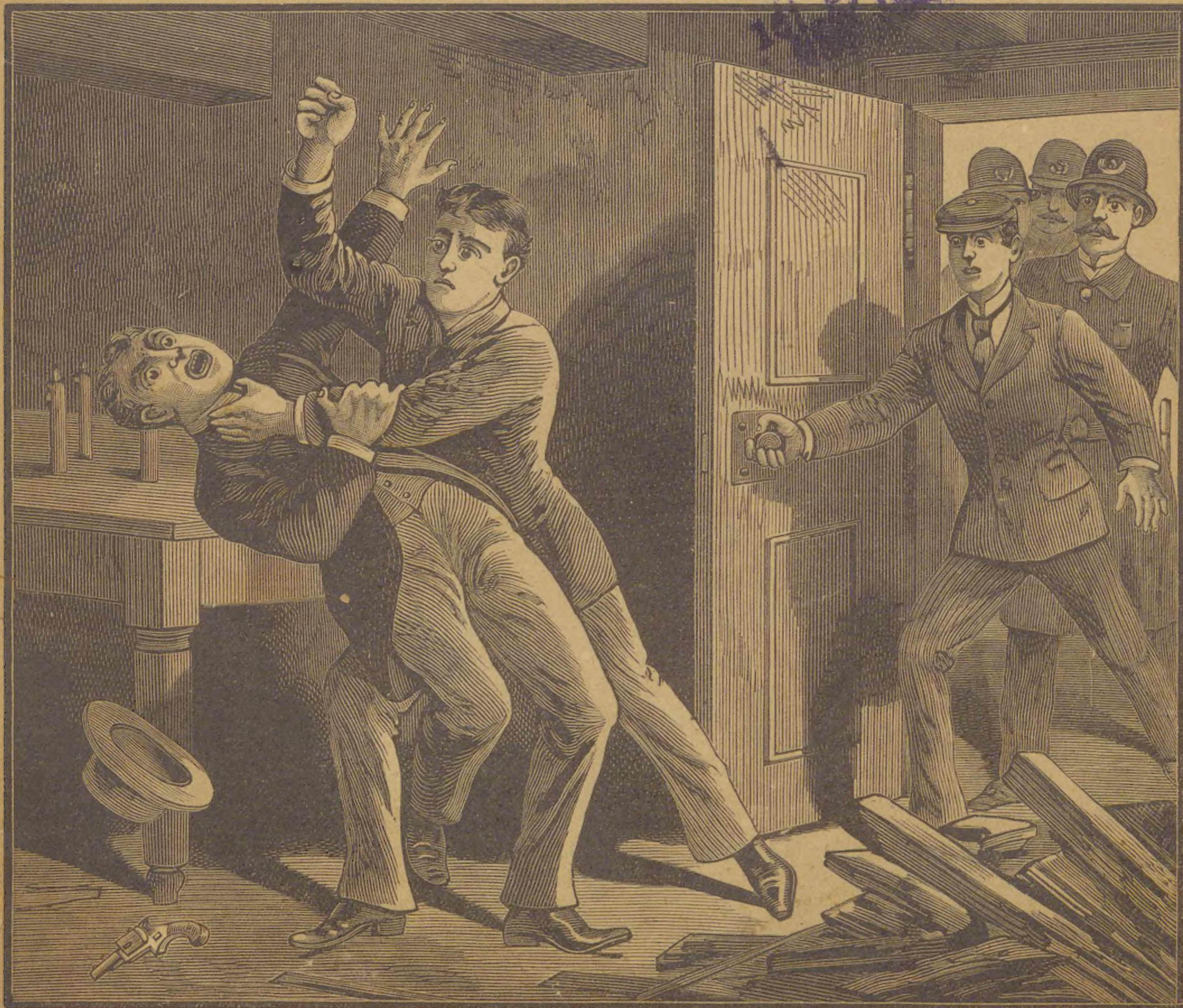
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SAM SHARPE AT SCHOOL. By Capt. Will Dayton.



"There! You ain't so good looking as you were, I'll bet," cried Sam, throwing the bully from him as though he had been some contagious object. "Hello, what's that?" The outside door was suddenly thrown open and in rushed Charlie Brower and half a dozen policemen.

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SAM SHARPE AT SCHOOL

By CAPT. WILL DAYTON.

Author of "The Boss of the School," "Billy Bangs' School Days," "Charlie Chubbs at College," "Fred Ford," "Ned Owen," "The Mad Hunter," "The Blasted Pine," "The Young Explorers," "Little Hal," "The Cruise of the 'Beauty,'" etc., etc., etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

SAM SHARPE'S INVITATION.

"I SAY, Sam, the big fellows are going to haze two new-comers to-night."

"They are, eh? Well, you can tell 'em for me that if they come any of their nonsense on this chap, they'll get more than they bargain for, and I mean it."

"You'd better open your box to 'em, Sam, treat 'em all around, and then they'll let you off. They're awful big fellows and you can't fight 'em."

"So you want me to buy 'em off, eh, and let the other chaps get licked?"

"Lots of fellows do it."

"They do? Well, I'm not that sort, Tom, and I mean it; 'tis either a treat or a hazing, is it?"

"Yes."

"All right, Tom. You needn't say what I told you. I'm going to ask the big fellows of the second class to supper in my room to-night."

"You ain't weakening, are you, Sam?" asked the other in evident disappointment.

"I'll let you know later on, Tom. Keep mum, that's all. I mean it, mind."

"I won't say a word."

"That's right, see that you don't. There'll be a bit of a lark to-night, Tom, and I mean it, but keep dark."

"As a Hottentot!"

Sam Sharpe was a boy of about fifteen, and this was his first term at Shady Dell School, a large establishment for boys only, situated on the Hudson, about forty miles from the City of New York.

Tom Tripp was in the same class, but his brother had been to this school and had posted him regarding the way in which new-comers were usually treated.

Some of the new ones had already begged off, but that was not Sam's way of doing business, and he determined to give the bullies a lesson which they would not soon forget.

The leader of the disorderly set in the school was one Bob Bragg, a big, burly fellow, seventeen years of age, a hard fighter, and a perfect bully and braggart.

Next to him, and about as bad, were Will Wrangel, Lon Lawless, and George Growle, these four being the ring-

leaders in every act of violence which occurred, and, also, for its reputation, the recognized heads of the school.

"There's a pretty tough crowd here," said Sam to himself, during the first morning at Shady Dell, "but there's a dozen first-rate fellows besides, and these brutes ain't going to walk over me, and I mean it."

When Tom had given Sam the information about the intended hazing, it was during the noon recess, and our hero immediately went to the head master, a weak, wishy-washy sort of man, and said:

"Mr. Kane, the new boys want to give a supper to the school to-night, in my room. It'll be an orderly affair, sir, and I mean it. Lights out and everybody abed by ten ten o'clock."

"But, Master Sharpe, I do not think that it is exactly according to custom, to——"

"We want to establish good feeling," said Tom, "and abolish hazing. This is the only way you can do it."

"Well, well, as far as I am concerned, you have my permission, but there is Dr. Strapp. He is the principal."

"Oh, well, they say he never meddles with these things, sir, and I thought you had more authority in such matters, and knowing that you were kind-hearted and disliked rows, I thought——"

"You have my permission, Master Sharpe," interposed the tutor, being tickled with the dose of flattery which Sam had slyly administered.

"Thank you, sir."

"It must be quiet, however, and be over at ten, and no liquors, cigars, or tobacco."

"All right, sir, we'll be as quiet as mice, drink nothing but lemonade, and smoke nothing but rattan and sweet fern," rejoined Sam, the latter part of his answer being said under his breath, however.

"We'll have a racket, and I mean it," chuckled Sam, as he went off to give orders for the preparation of the feast to be given that night.

When school was out that afternoon, the older boys, but particularly the hazing element, were very much surprised at seeing a notice posted upon the bulletin outside, which read as follows:

"ATTENTION.

"The school is hereby invited to be present at a spread

tied to their heads, took out of the beds and threw them into a closet.

"Now mop up the floor, boys, and be quick about it, for I hear old Strapp stirring down-stairs."

"Oh, he'll send for Kane to investigate," laughed Noble, "and we all knew what that means."

The floor was quickly mopped up and then the boys put out the lights, popped into bed, and were snoring like butchers when the door opened and in walked Kane, with a light in his hand, followed by Ingraham, Brower, and one or two others of the larger boys.

"What is the meaning of this disturbance?" cried the master, as sternly as he knew how. "The rooms below are completely flooded, and there has been perfect bedlam going on up here."

"Been having another surprise party, I take it," said Ingraham, with a laugh.

"With the surprise where it wasn't expected," added Brower.

"Another case of waking up the wrong passenger," suggested Hardy.

"What is the meaning of these remarks, young gentlemen?" demanded Kane. "Ingraham, wake up these lads and ask them for an explanation of their extraordinary conduct. My word! how they do snore!"

"They've cracked the plastering and made the roof leak," laughed Brower, "and the water has run down below."

"But it isn't raining, Master Brower!"

"Looks as though there had been a flood here," came from Hardy.

"Young gentleman, cease this ill-timed levity!" cried Kane, himself beginning to laugh. "Ingraham, wake these youngsters up."

"They sleep very sound, sir."

"What business have they to sleep when all in the house are awake?"

At this time there was a titter from the beds, then a giggle, afterwards a snort, and after that a ringing laugh, while all the boys sat up in bed and stared in well-feigned surprise at their visitors.

"Well, if that isn't the funniest dream I ever had," remarked Sam, with a grin.

"You all seem to have been similarly affected," observed Kane. "A remarkable coincidence, surely. Master Sharpe, you will please explain the recent disturbance in this room, and if I catch you in a falsehood you'll get a hundred bad marks."

"You never caught me in a lie yet, and you never will, and I mean it. I don't deal in that sort of goods. Somebody came in here to duck us and got ducked, that's all."

"Who was it?"

"You'll have to ask them, sir, for I ain't telling tales to-night. I guess they went away satisfied," he added, in so dry a manner that every one broke out into a laugh.

"I can guess who were the aggressors in this instance," observed Kane, at length. "Now go to sleep, and let me hear no more of this. You ought to know that hazing is strictly forbidden."

"That's the rule I went by," laughed Sam, "and I guess the Bragg crowd understand it."

CHAPTER IV.

A MOST VILLAINOUS DEED.

THERE was no difficulty in discovering the identity of the discomfited hazers, although neither Sam nor his fellows breathed a word about the affair, except strictly amongst themselves.

The water with which they had first greeted their visitors was filled with soot and lamp-black, and these substances stuck to the white night-shirts of the culprits and "would not out," as the poet has it.

Subsequent inspection of the linen of the establishment revealed this fact, and the would-be hazers were easily detected.

"I should think you fellows had had enough of Sam Sharpe and his chums," was Ingraham's remark to Bragg and Lawless the next day, on the play-ground. "Perhaps you'll know enough to let 'em alone after this."

"We'll get even yet," growled Bragg as Ingraham walked away. "I'll fix Master Sam Sharpe yet, see if I don't. When I make up my mind to do a thing I generally do it, as he will discover before many days have passed over his head."

The opportunity soon came, and in a manner quite unexpected.

In playing a game of football Sam accidentally received a kick in the side, entirely unintentional, by the way, which necessitated his removal to the sick-room; a fever, caused by over-excitement, set in, and made him quite delirious.

The sick-room was on the lower floor of the main school building, was lighted by gas, the dormitories having lamps and candles, which were extinguished at ten o'clock.

Sam was sleeping quietly at ten o'clock when the nurse went away, leaving the gas turned low, so that if Sam should awake and want anything he could see to pull the bell-rope communicating with her room and hanging close to hand.

An hour afterwards, the house being perfectly quiet, a figure crept swiftly and silently down the stairs from the region of the dormitories, and, pausing in front of the sick-room door, gazed cautiously around.

Hearing no sound, the figure, which was that of Bragg, softly turned the knob of the door and quickly pushed it open, so that there might be no creaking to awaken the sleeper.

Sam lay sound asleep, the subdued light falling upon his face, and as Bragg saw it, he hissed:

"Ha! you won't look so handsome to-morrow, Master Sharpe!"

Then approaching the little stand by the bedside where the tumblers containing Sam's medicine had been placed, the bully sprinkled a white powder into each and muttered under his breath:

"That'll settle the business, and it'll be laid to the carelessness of the nurse."

He had put poison into the glasses!

"Stop a moment," he whispered, as he was about to leave, "they may not think he needs the medicine. I must make an excuse for giving it to him."

Then blowing out the tiny jet of gas, the young villain turned the key flat across, so as to let on a full head, and as the gas came pouring into the room he hurried out, closed

the door, and retreated to the upper part of the house without having been discovered.

"If one don't fix him the other will," he thought to himself, as he crept noiselessly up the broad stairs. "We'll see who wins now!"

Now it happened that Charlie Bowers' room, which he occupied alone, being one of the older boys and having more privileges than the younger ones, was situated next to the sick-room, with which it connected by a door, always kept locked.

Although Charlie was a light sleeper he did not hear that soft, cat-like tread, nor the muttered exclamations of the villain, in fact knew nothing about the matter.

Something else more potent caused him to awake about half an hour after Bragg had gone up, and he got up feeling a terrible splitting sensation in his head.

"What's the matter?" he murmured. "The air in this room is horrible! I shall have to open the window wider."

He had to pass the door connecting with the sick-room to do this, and as he did so a strong odor of escaping gas attracted his attention puzzling him considerably.

"Gas?" he mused. "There is no gas connection with this room. I wonder if the pipes can have burst?"

Stooping down, his face came on a level with the key-hole of the sick-room door.

"It's in there!" he muttered. "The gas must have blown out and is now escaping. By George, Sam will be suffocated!"

Lighting a lamp, he hastily drew on his trousers and slippers, and leaving the lamp upon the table, fearing to take it with him, he caught up half a dozen matches and went into the hall.

Throwing open the sick-room door, he rushed in, but had not taken more than three or four steps, when the gas overpowered him, and he fell against the little stand, upsetting it with a crash and throwing its contents upon the floor.

He staggered to his feet with an effort and tried to open the window.

"It was secured by a spring catch!"

"My God! the poor boy will be poisoned!" he gasped, his own strength beginning to fail him.

He had left the hall-door open, and that was in his favor, but he was already weakened by breathing the vitiated air. Should he now fall in a faint his death would be certain.

Tearing off one of his slippers he dashed out one of the panes with the heel, and drinking in the fresh air which poured through the hole felt greatly relieved.

Smashing out the glass in one of the other panes, he sprang to the bed and seizing Sam in his arms, dragged him, blankets and all, into the hall outside.

The poor boy was pale and haggard and seemed to scarcely breathe, his lips being covered with a thin white foam and his hair wringing with cold sweat.

Fearing to go into the room again to ring the nurse's bell, Charlie laid Sam on the floor, where the light from the hall lamp shone upon his face, and hurrying through the corridor he quickly aroused Mr. Kane, the nurse and two or three of the older boys.

"Did you leave the gas turned on in Sam's room?" he asked the nurse.

"Yes, sir."

"Then you have killed him by your carelessness. You had better do all that you can now, to atone somewhat for your criminal neglect."

CHAPTER V.

THE CULPRIT DISCOVERED.

"BUT I left the gas burning just a trifle, Master Brower, and now it is turned on full."

So said the nurse to Charlie Brower, the two having gone into the room after Sam had been taken elsewhere.

Charlie said that such was the case, and turned off the flood of gas that was still coming into the room.

The air could be breathed now and the nurse made it more so by opening the window to its fullest extent.

The wind caught up a little slip of paper lying on the carpet and tossed it at Charlie's feet, and he, stooping and picking it up, took it to the light and read it.

"H'm!" was all he said, and then, taking a light into the room, for it was now safe to do so, he picked up one of the overturned tumblers, in the bottom of which there was still a white sediment.

"I must take care of that," he thought, though he said nothing, merely looking around to find the other glass.

It had been broken to pieces by the fall it had received, and picking up the fragments, Charlie threw them out of the window.

Sam, meanwhile, had been taken to another room, and the school physician summoned, the latter doing all he could, though Sam's case was now serious.

When Charlie had become convinced that he could do nothing more that night, he went to bed again, but was up again the next morning bright and early, and on his way to the town, some three miles distant.

He was late to chapel, breakfast and recitations, but he received the reprimands of Dr. Strapp, Mr. Kane and, the rest, with a quiet smile, and went about his duties as usual.

In the afternoon he was off again, after having paid a visit to Sam and finding him still in a very precarious situation, and did not return until after the school-grounds had been closed.

He was obliged to ring the porter's bell, and that functionary, having admitted him, said with a grin:

"Please, sir, I was to tell you to report to Dr. Strapp the moment you arrived."

"Very well, Hodge. You did quite right in mentioning it, although I should have done so without this reminder. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir. Well, of all the cool heads, his is the coolest!" added Hodge, as the young fellow passed on towards the school buildings.

Charlie found Dr. Strapp awaiting him in his study, and when he entered the principal greeted him with a frown, saying, sternly:

"You have absented yourself without permission?"

"I have."

"And you cut prayers and one recitation this morning, to say nothing of breakfast?"

"I did."

"Do you know the penalty of——"

"Will you hear my excuse, and——"

"Your conduct can admit of no excuse."

"An explanation, perhaps, may——"

"No!" thundered the irate principal. "If you had good reasons for absenting yourself you should have asked permission."

"I was not certain of obtaining it. I had my reasons for not asking it. My suspicions, too, I might say."

"Zounds, sir! Do you set the laws of this establishment at defiance!" roared the exasperated doctor, the boy's cool replies completely upsetting him. "Perhaps you are aware that expulsion——"

"I shall not give you the chance to expel me. I shall be only too glad to leave a place where murderers are harbored and protected."

"What do you mean?" gasped the man, now white as a sheet.

"Ah, you will listen to me then? Very well," and the lad took a seat by the table and laid several papers upon it.

"This little package contains arsenic," he began, "this vial, the contents of a medicine glass found in Master Sharpe's room, as well as this little bit of paper, which you see has evidently come from a druggist's, to judge by the label."

"Well, sir, and all this——"

"Here is an affidavit, sworn to by myself, describing the finding of these several articles and the subsequent steps taken by me. Here is another, of a chemist, swearing to his analysis of certain solutions given him by me, and lastly, here is the sworn statement of a druggist in town relative to the sale of a quantity of arsenic to one of the pupils of Shady Dell School."

Dr. Strapp read the several papers carefully, and then exclaimed:

"And I am to gather from this——"

"That Robert Bragg did, with evil intent, purchase a quantity of arsenic, which he put into the medicine glass of Sam Sharpe, for purposes best known to himself. That he also left the gas vent open, I have no doubt, but that remains to be proven."

"You can't prove that he put the arsenic——"

"I can prove that he bought it, and that that found in the bottom of the glass is the same kind, and any jury in the land, had Sam Sharpe taken his dose and died, would find him guilty of murder. I can put two leading facts together, and so can you, and so would a jury."

"But——"

"There are no buts about it. Bragg has hated Sharpe from the beginning, and has been heard to swear that he would fix him. He said he wanted this poison to kill a dog which had been destroying his chickens. He is the only one of all the fellows that has no pets of any kind, and you know yourself that our house dogs wouldn't hurt any pet belonging to the boys."

"It certainly looks bad and I shall question him about it. You may go now, but must forfeit your half holidays for a month, for going away without permission."

"I must say that my suspicions that you knew about this matter and were shielding the culprit were not entirely groundless," cried Charlie indignantly. "If Bragg is not

expelled this very night I will leave, take all the decent fellows with me, and break up the school!"

Then he bounded out of the room, leaving Dr. Strapp very much astonished, and hurrying up-stairs went directly to No. Six, where Bragg and some of his cronies slept.

As he pushed open the door he saw, by the flood of moonlight, Bragg himself sitting up in bed and crying in the utmost terror:

"I didn't poison him! It was the nurse. She gave him the arsenic, she left the gas turned on. She is the murderer. I am innocent, your honor and gentlemen!"

Charlie advanced nearer and took a good look at Bragg. He was sound asleep, though his eyes were open and he was talking in his sleep.

Charlie awoke several of the boys and they heard what Bragg said, the scoundrel continuing to rave as though addressing a judge and jury, as though he were on trial for his life.

"That's all the evidence I want," muttered Brower. "I was going to force the wretch into a confession, but he has saved me the trouble."

CHAPTER VI.

A RASCALLY PLOT OVERHEARD.

SAM has recovered from his illness, and he and Charlie Brower are sworn friends.

Bragg has been expelled, though he hastily left the school the next morning in order to avoid a public dismissal.

Since that time two months more passed, and it is now winter and the boys are in the full enjoyment of the festive season, expecting before long to go home for the Christmas holidays.

But though Bragg had been expelled he hated Sam just as much as ever, and as Brower had been the means of exposing him, the latter was also included in his calculations, when thinking of a fitting revenge to work upon Sam.

His chums, Grabbe, Growle, Lawless and Tubbs, were rather more quiet and reserved in their deportment than they had been before his expulsion, but they were still ready to do his bidding and help him to injure Sam in every possible way.

It was quite late and Lawless, who had a room to himself now, was sitting up, when a stone was thrown against his window.

"That you, Bob?" he whispered, opening the window.

"Yes, let me in."

"All right," and presently a fine rope ladder was thrown out, the end being made fast to the window ledge.

In a few moments Bragg appeared, and stepping in the room closed the window, and said:

"How goes everything?"

"About the same. You'd think Sam Sharpe was the head of the school."

"Do you want to know how to take him down?"

"I'd like to, but I can't fight him. I tried that once and got a black eye for my trouble. Stubbs used to be considered a hard hitter, too, but he's no match for him. We can't bully him, that's certain."

"No, but we can ruin him. I can't appear, of course, because if I was seen they would take a tumble and drop to the whole thing."

"How are you going to work it?"

"Several things have been stolen from the boys lately, with no clew to the thief."

"Yes."

"Sam has lost nothing?"

"No."

"Let the things be found in his desk."

"Good; and in his coat, too."

"All right. Give me some marked money, and to-morrow, at the cricket match, I will contrive to enter the dressing-rooms and conceal it in his coat."

"I've got some now," and Lawless produced two or three silver half dollars, marked with a cross on the edge, which he gave to Bragg.

"That will do," said the latter. "Can you manage to put some of those pieces in his room?"

"I'll try; but he has a room with Brower now, and it'll be hard to fix it."

"Throw suspicion on him, too. Here, take this lump of wax and get an impression of the lock. Give it to me to-morrow morning, and I'll have a key made. Then, in the afternoon, when everybody is out, let Growle or Stubbs unlock the door and put the stuff where it will be easily found."

"I'll do it."

"Now I must go. Stop, though. Suppose we have a drink first."

"I haven't anything."

"No, but I have," and Bragg produced a small flask from his pocket, and taking a drink himself handed it to his companion in guilt.

They talked a while longer, when suddenly Bragg ran to the window and, throwing it up, cried:

"Did you hear anything?"

"No."

"I thought I heard the ladder knock against the wall."

"The wind might have done that."

"No it sounded as if somebody had been on it, and in jumping off had let it fall against the house."

"Nonsense."

"Well, perhaps I was mistaken, but at any rate be cautious. I daren't stay any longer. So, good-night."

Bragg then climbed down to the bottom and made his way out of the grounds unobserved, Lawless pulling up the ladder and securing it when he had gone.

Bragg had been correct about there being some one on the ladder, and that some one was the very person against whom he and Lawless had been plotting.

Sam Sharpe was there, and heard all their plots, and this is how it happened.

Unknown to Lawless, Sam had received permission that very night to go down to the village after a book, and upon his return, which occurred shortly after Bragg's entrance into the grounds, he had seen the window open, and had heard Lawless whisper to his friend.

He was concealed behind the shrubbery, and fearing mischief had remained perfectly still until he saw a figure

making its way up the side of the building, being just able to distinguish it in the dim light.

Waiting until the figure had disappeared within the room and the window had been closed, he made his way quietly to that part of the building where he discovered the ladder, which had not been drawn up.

Climbing it without noise, he listened under the window, and heard the whole plot; hurrying down again quietly, and in his haste making the noise which Bragg had heard, but concealing himself so well that the young rascals' suspicions were completely quieted.

CHAPTER VII.

BRAGG TRIES A NEW DEAL.

THE plot arranged by Bragg and Lawless did not work as well as was expected.

In the first place Sam had a new lock put on his door in the forenoon, without letting anybody but Brower and the housekeeper know anything about it.

This was after the wax impression had been taken, as he easily discovered it had been, putting a lighted match inside the key-hole, the heat causing what little wax had remained to melt and run down.

In the next place he had a lock put upon the dressing-room door—it had formerly been without one—and gave the key to the porter with particular instructions to let none but contestants in the place.

This blocked the game of Lawless, for, although he had access to the room, he was there at the same time with Sam, and could not therefore conceal the money himself, nor could Bragg, who being an outsider, could not get in as he had thought of doing.

Then, too, when Growle tried to unlock Sam's door with the key that Bragg had given him, he found to his dismay that it would not enter the lock at all, being much too small.

"Confound it, he's gone and changed the lock!" muttered the discomfited plotters, after taking a survey of the door and discovering for the first time the change that had taken place in it.

He went back to the cricket grounds, and meeting Bragg on the way made known his discovery.

"Somebody was on the ladder, then," growled Bragg. "I was sure of it. The whole plot has been overheard and blocked. I can't get into the dressing-room, as the porter watches it like a dragon, and Lawless don't get a chance to be there alone. Confound it, all the fat's in the fire."

"Here's your key. I don't want it now. It's of no use."

"Give it to me. I may be able to make use of it yet. It will file down."

"It won't be any good for a skeleton, for they've got a spring lock on the door."

"The deuce!"

"They've done you this time, Bob. Won't Lon be hopping. Why he's been going around saying that he suspects who the thief is and will give him away before long."

"The stupid fool! He'll get us all into a hole. I'm sorry about that lock, because I wanted Lon to get me something particular out of Sam's room, something I've just found out about."

"What is it?"

"Never mind now, I'll tell you afterwards."

The next day Bragg met Lawless in the town and said to him:

"Our plan didn't work, did it?"

"No, but those fellows, if they know anything, have been keeping mighty still about it."

"Well, I've got another one. Sam Sharpe has got a paper in his room somewhere, which I want; it's a will, or rather a deed of gift given him by a man in New York. Sam, having no father, keeps it by him."

"Well what of it?"

"This paper gives Sam a piece of valuable property located in New York. His father and the donor were great friends, and on that account this man has made Sam a valuable present, though it is understood that he is not to take possession until the man dies."

"What is all this to you?"

"This much; I am that man's heir, in default of a will, and I know that none has been made. Now if that bit of paper is destroyed, all this will go to me."

"I see; but won't you get enough without this?"

"No, I want the whole of it. I discovered this through my lawyer, and he advised me to get hold of the paper at any hazard."

"There's no use in trying to get into their room, for it can't be done."

"Then we must get Sam down to New York on some pretense or other, and once there I will manage him."

Between them they fixed up a plan, and that night Sam received a telegram from New York, telling him that his friend was dead, and that he was wanted in the city at once.

He was requested to bring all his papers with him, as it was feared that his claims to certain property would be contested.

Sam instantly made preparations for going down, and, communicating this intention to Brower, was surprised by the latter saying:

"Then I'll go with you."

"But, Chass, there's no need."

"Maybe there is," replied Charlie. "My father's a lawyer, and he'll take hold of your affairs and put them through."

"But can't you give me letters to him?"

"I could, but I'm going down with you. I don't half like the way this thing is going. You didn't know your friend was sick, did you?"

"No, and he's a very healthy man. Why, I thought him good for ten years yet."

"I'll bet it's a hoax to get you out of the way. Are there any relatives who would like to step in between you and the old fellow?"

"A few, I believe; but I don't know who they are."

"Well, I'm going down to the city with you."

"I'm sure I've no objections, Chass, but really there's no need."

"Perhaps there may be," and he was quite right about that.

The next morning our two friends were given a good send off by their friends, and as they drove out of the

school grounds towards the railroad station, Dick Dash called for three cheers, which were given with a will.

They had to wait in the depot about ten minutes, and while they were there, Charlie noticed a rough-looking man watching them very attentively, and in a manner which aroused the boys' suspicions.

"That fellow is a rogue," he said to himself. "I must watch him. I don't know his game, but I am sure he means mischief."

So he did; for the fellow was a spy, employed by Bragg to watch the boys, see that they took the train, and report accordingly.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHARLIE'S SUSPICIONS.—THE LOQUACIOUS COACHMAN.

WHEN the two boys got onto the train and sat down, Charlie noticed that the suspicious looking man was in the same coach, a few seats back, still watching them, but not as closely as before.

Charlie did not let the fellow know that he was being watched as well, but he nevertheless kept an eye upon him and did not miss a single movement.

He said nothing to Sam, and both boys chatted away merrily for an hour or so, when the train made a sudden stop which threw the passengers from their seats.

Sam instantly put his head out of the window and asked a man whom he saw what the matter was.

"Accident ahead of us—car off the track—our track obstructed."

"Any one hurt?"

"Man or two killed, I believe. They've taken them to a farm-house."

"How long will we be detained here, do you suppose?"

"About an hour, I reckon."

Charlie had put his head out the window next to Sam's, and at the end of this conversation he withdrew it and looked around.

The man he had been watching was gone!

Several persons had left the car and he might be one of them.

There could certainly be nothing suspicious in this, and Charlie did not think much about it.

He himself got out, and as he walked up to a little way station not far off, at which this train did not usually stop, he saw the man lounging about with a sandwich in his hand.

Had he been a little sooner he would have known that the man had sent a telegraph dispatch to Bragg in New York, the substance of which was as follows:

"Both the boys on train. Been delayed by an accident. Will be an hour late. Have the carriage in waiting."

"He's all right, I guess," said Charlie, to himself. "Perhaps he wasn't watching us at all. Some of these countrymen have a way of staring at everybody."

After the train had started again, the man occupied a seat in another car, and Charlie told Sam his suspicions, the latter laughing at him, and saying:

"Pshaw! Chass, you musn't be frightened at every old tramp you see!"

"I am not, but I'll bet that this fellow means mischief of some kind against us; what it is I cannot tell."

"Perhaps he is a confidence man," said Sam, with a laugh. "He looks so sharp, and we're so green, you know."

"You can make as much fun as you like," said Charlie, "but I still believe the fellow means mischief, and I propose that we get off at the coming station and wait for the next train."

"That won't do us any good, for then he'll be waiting for us in New York. You're older than I, Chass, and know more, but I think you're wrong in this case."

"Perhaps so," and then nothing more was said.

Charlie was so impressed with this notion, however, that he was for speaking to the fellow and pumping him, but Sam only laughed, and so the matter was dropped again, not to be resumed.

When they reached the city Sam was going to take a hack to his friend's residence, but as he was about to call one a liveried coachman stepped up, and touching his hat, said very politely:

"This is Master Sharpe, is it not? You got the telegram announcing the master's death, then? Very sad, was it not? Have you any baggage? I'll get it for you if you have. This is your friend? Very fine young gentleman, if he'll pardon my saying it."

"Who is the glib gentleman in the togs?" whispered Charlie.

"Blessed if I know, and I mean it. Ah, I think you have the advantage of me," he continued, addressing the man in livery.

"Oh, yes, very likely. It's not to be wondered at that you did not know me; young gents don't take much notice of coachmen, you know. No offense intended, of course."

"But why should I notice coachmen? Who in the name of Manhattan island are you, my friend that I should?"

"Oh yes, beg pardon, Master Sharpe. You always were facetious. Why, I am James, sir, coachman to the late lamented Mr. Raymond, poor, dear gentleman," and the fellow wiped a tear from the corner of his eye with a silk handkerchief.

"Oh, so you are James? Really, I did not remember you."

"Quite likely, sir, quite likely. They sent me for you and I recognized you at a glance. Very sad, is it not, this sudden taking off. You will come in for a pretty penny, but it is nevertheless a distressing calamity. Beg pardon, did you say you had any baggage?"

"Only my valise. My friend has a small one also. He will go with me to the house."

"Very good, sir. Shall I put the bags on the box? No? Very well, young gents, they are safer there, no doubt; but my master, poor Mr. Raymond, always recommended me for my honesty, and I assure you——"

"Oh, I don't doubt your honesty in the least," said Sam. "Is this your coach? All right, then. Pile in Chass. I prefer to keep the valise in my hand, and you may consider your honesty perfectly safe with me."

"Ah, youth is always high-spirited," answered James, lugubriously. "But I do not blame you, sir. Drive on and stop my noise? Yes, sir; always most happy to obey Master Sharpe."

Sam had already slammed the carriage door, and now

the mournful James mounted the box and drove off, following the direction taken by the suspicious looking man already spoken of, and muttering to himself:

"I've got the two birds nicely snared, and if they ain't soon caged and their wings clipped I'm a liar, that's all."

CHAPTER IX.

CAPTURED.

THE two boys became so deeply engrossed in conversation that it was at least ten minutes before Sam thought to look out and see how far they had gone.

When he did so, he looked around with a puzzled expression, and said to Charlie:

"I don't believe this talkative fellow knows where he's going. This isn't the right direction at all for Mr. Raymond's house."

"Don't you know where we are?"

As they reached a corner, Sam caught a glimpse at the sign on a street-lamp, and said:

"We're in Thirty-second street, and he lives in Thirty-fifth. Then we are going east, and he lives on the west side."

"Perhaps he has moved since you were in the city."

"But he wouldn't live in such a neighborhood as this," cried Sam, as they turned a sharp corner, and drove through a narrow alley, where the sight of a carriage with a liveried coachman on top and two well-dressed persons inside must have been an unusual one.

"I don't know what he means," mused Sam. "He wasn't drunk, that's certain, and he couldn't have mistaken me for any one else."

Indeed he had not, for he had been cautioned to take no one else but Sam Sharpe and his friend, and the spy had seen that he did not.

"I'll speak to him," muttered Sam, and he put his hand on the knob of the door, so as to open it, and speak to the coachman.

The knob would not turn, however, the door being evidently locked.

"Try the other side, Chass."

Charlie did so, but with the same result as before.

The vehicle was a coupe with an open glass-front, and having failed with the doors, Sam now endeavored to slide back the glass in front, so as to attract the driver's attention.

The panel would not give way, however, being apparently fastened, as had been the doors.

The windows in the doors were also found to be secured, and finally, as a last resort, the man on the box seeming to be totally unconscious of the boys' efforts, Sam rapped smartly on the front panel in order to attract his attention.

This had the desired effect, and the man looked around, although he did not abate his speed in the least.

"Where are you taking us to?" shouted Sam. "You're going the wrong way."

"Eh!" shouted the fellow; and Sam repeated his words.

"Can't hear you," was the answer, a lie by the way, as the man had heard what Sam had said the first time.

"Stop the coach!"

"What's that?"

"Smash the glass, and, perhaps he'll stop then!" cried Charlie. "I believe this is a plot."

"Stop, I say!" fairly yelled Sam, and this time the man appeared to hear him, for in a few moments he drew rein in front of a small three-story house, the entrance being upon the ground floor, all the other houses in the block being of the same description.

As he stopped two men walked up and came to a halt just behind the carriage.

"Where are you taking us?" asked Sam, as the man bent his head to hear him better.

"To Mr. Raymond's."

"But this isn't the right way."

"Yes, it is."

"I say not. Let us out. We'll go without you."

"All right," and the man got down from his seat and opened the door.

He had thrown off his high hat and coat of livery, and simply wore a rough coat and cap, presenting quite a different appearance from what he had when they first saw him.

"What d'yer say?" he gruffly demanded, dropping his oily tones and obsequious manners as though they had been a part of his livery.

"What do you mean by taking us wrong?"

"Oh, well, if you don't like it, you can get out, that's all. Ye're nothin' but duffers, anyhow."

Sam leaped out, and aimed a furious blow at the insolent fellow, but as he did so, the two men behind the carriage suddenly sprang forward and seized him.

At the same moment a person came out of the house, and to Sam's surprise he recognized Bragg.

"In with him!" yelled the bully. "Never mind the other fellow. Drive him off anywhere. Dump him in the river if you like."

But Charlie had already sprang out upon the walk, and had aimed a blow at Bragg.

The two men had meanwhile dragged Sam inside, and one of them now returned, and with the assistance of the coachman and Bragg succeeded in doing the same for Charlie.

Then the coach drove rapidly away, the few street urchins who had begun to collect were dispersed by a few kicks, and the street again wore its usual deserted appearance.

The two boys were then dragged, much against their will, to a room at the top of the house lighted by one small window only, and utterly devoid of furniture, where they were locked in and left to themselves.

CHAPTER X.

THE PRISONERS MAKE AN ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE.

"Do you think there is any chance of getting out of this place, Charlie?" asked Sam when they had looked about them a bit.

"I don't know; suppose we look out of that window. It's too high, though, I think."

"Not a bit, and I mean it. Do you stand up against the wall and let me get on your back. Charlie, rise up, and I'll stand on your shoulders."

Charlie did as suggested, and Sam found that by standing on his friend's shoulders he could easily look through the window, or might, if the glass were removed.

"Hold still a moment, Chass," he said "till I get out my knife. I can't tell how high the window is unless I can stick my head out."

Then taking out his knife he cut away the division between two of the panes, and taking them out, handed them to Charlie.

"Hurry up, Sam! I didn't think you could get so heavy in a few minutes."

Sam stuck his head through the opening he had made and discovered that there was a height of fully thirty feet from there to the ground, and that the window looked into a rear yard surrounded by a fence a good ten feet in height.

"Look out, I'm coming down," he then cried, "catch me."

Charlie caught him in his arms, and when he stood on the floor again, he said:

"There's a carpet on this floor and I've got a knife. That window is just about big enough for us to crawl through."

"Make a rope with strips of carpet and let ourselves down? A good idea, Sam, only you've forgotten something."

"What's that?"

"Who's to help you up after I've got out?"

"I thought of that."

"Well, how are you going to manage it? I certainly shan't go and leave you, and I don't know as I want to be left myself. You might go for help, though."

"No, we'll both of us go, and I'll tell you how to manage it. Fasten one end of the rope about the door-knob, let me get outside and hang my weight on it, and then you can climb up over-handed till you reach the window, when I will slide down and give you a chance."

"Good! Why, you've got to work already, haven't you?" for Sam had been slashing into the carpet and already had cut two or three strips half a yard wide, and eight or ten feet in length.

These he gave to Charlie to knot together stoutly, while he cut more strips.

"They'll have to buy another carpet, and I mean it," he said, with a laugh, as he cut off three additional strips and handed them to Charlie. "As long as I've begun I may as well keep on. We can double it, and so make it all the stronger."

"Better hurry up; those fellows may come back."

By this time they had obtained a rope more than fifty feet in length, which they had tested by pulling against each other with all their strength, finding it able to stand their strain very well.

Securing one end to the door-knob, and passing one turn around the middle bar of the window-sash to make it stronger yet, Sam climbed through, and pulling his weight on the curious rope let the end fall to the ground and began sliding down.

As soon as Charlie saw the rope tauten, he sprang up and began swinging himself toward the window.

He had nearly reached it when he suddenly heard a sound that filled him with the utmost dismay.

Somebody was coming along the passageway outside.

They would open the door, the rope would be slackened and Sam dashed to the ground.

He must prevent this, if possible, but how could he warn Sam, who was doubtless waiting for him half-way down the rope.

The step sounded nearer and he could not hope to reach the window and shout to Sam before it would be opened.

Then the door must not be opened!

Quick as a flash the boy dropped to the ground, and leaping across the room threw himself against the door at the very moment that the key was put in the lock and the knob turned.

"Hallo, what's the matter?" said a voice outside, and then in a lower tone, "I wonder if they've bolted it inside."

Charlie, looking down for the first time, discovered a heavy bolt at the bottom of the door, which could be shot into a slot in the floor.

Dropping upon his knees he drove the bolt into place as the person outside once more put his shoulder to the door and endeavored to open it.

"Hallo! inside there. Open the door or I'll smash it!"

"Smash, and be blamed," cried Charlie, and then he threw himself up and caught the rope.

He had changed his hands, but once, however, when the rope suddenly slackened and came flying through the window at a fearful rate, letting Charlie down with a thump.

"What's the matter with Sam? Can he have fallen?" was his first thought.

At that instant, however, the upper part of the door was broken in by a blow from a sledge hammer, and the evil face of Bragg was seen outside, in company with the man they had seen at the railroad station.

"Where is the other one?" cried Bragg. "He must not escape."

The man now put his hand through the broken panel and withdrew the bolt, but at the same time Brower seized one of the broken bits of wood from the door and gave him a crack over the head with it that rendered him insensible.

Then pulling open the door he dashed out, and rushing upon Bragg threw him against the balustrade, and bounding past him flew down the stairs three steps at a time.

Crack!

Crack!

Bragg had drawn a pistol, and two shots went flying after Charlie, but fortunately he had turned a corner and the bullets lodged in the wall instead of in his head, as they would have done had he been within range.

"By Jove! that was a close shave!" cried Brower, as he sped along the hall toward the top of the next flight.

Crack!

Crack!

This time the bannister-rail prevented a catastrophe, as the splinters attested, and Charlie did not breathe freely until he had reached the lower hall, burst open the door, and dashed out into the street.

He could see nothing of Sam, and thinking he might be in the back yard still, attempted to open the door again.

To his surprise it was securely locked!

CHAPTER XI.

CHARLIE SUCCEEDS IN GETTING OUT.

WHEN Sam let himself out of the window it was his intention to slide down for about half the distance, and then wait until Charlie appeared above.

As he reached the window of the second story, however, it was suddenly thrown open and a dark-browed, ruffianly-looking man threw himself half out and seized the rope.

His face was almost upon a level with Sam's, and the latter was so startled by the sudden apparition that he nearly lost his hold on the rope.

"You young viper! you mean to escape, do you?" he hissed, attempting to pull Sam up by the rope, for the boy had begun sliding rapidly downward, when he recovered from his first surprise.

"You will. will you?" growled the man, pulling the rope up several feet, and securing the end under one foot.

Then pulling it up again so that Sam was just below him, he suddenly reached one hand into the room, and seizing a carving-knife from a table, held it against the rope drawn tightly across the window-sill.

"Slide down another foot and I'll cut it!" he cried, in a tone of determination. "Hallo, there!" he added to some one inside, "run up and stop the other fellow from getting away."

He turned his back to Sam for a second while he shouted this, and in that second Sam slid down the rope as fast as he dared.

The man suddenly turned around, and seeing Sam's movement uttered a frightful oath.

Then leaning far out he drew the keen blade across the rope and severed it in an instant.

At that moment Sam was within ten feet of the ground. As the rope was sundered, he fell, striking upon his back on the stones, where he lay like one dead.

"Ha!" grunted the man above, looking down upon him, "He's all right, but lest he may revive and try to get away, I'll go down and take care of him."

He started for the door quite leisurely, when he suddenly heard a noise on the stairs outside, and then two pistol shots.

"Hallo! something's up!" he cried.

Running to the door he threw it open, and at that moment Charlie Brower dashed by, and went bounding down the stairs.

Two more shots were fired, but the railing was in the way and Charlie got off unscathed.

"Hold on!" called the fellow. "Stop your shooting. Do you want to alarm the neighborhood?"

Then he rushed after Charlie, who had been too excited to notice or even hear him, but by the time he reached the door the boy was outside.

Quickly bolting and locking the door, the man made his way hastily to the rear and thence into the back yard.

Sam was still lying unconscious upon the cold stones, a

spot of blood showing he had struck his head, perhaps broken it.

"Thunder and blazes!" ejaculated the man, "suppose he's cracked his skull! We'll have to get out of here mighty sudden if that's the case. Don't know but what we'll have to anyhow, if that confounded fool has raised an alarm with that popgun of his."

Raising the inanimate body from the ground he turned it over, passed his hand along the skull, and muttered, with a long-drawn sigh of relief:

"No, he's all right. Broken the skin a little, that's all."

There was a flight of three or four stone steps not far away, leading down from the yard to the cellar, and thither the man dragged his insensible burden, pushing open the door and quickly drawing Sam inside, as the numerous residents of the neighborhood were beginning to throw up their windows to see what had occasioned the firing.

When he had got the boy inside he laid him on a rough bench, and then turned to go up by a flight of rickety wooden steps leading to the floor above.

"Guess I won't try those steps," he muttered, turning away. "They ain't been used in a long while, and the last time anybody stepped on 'em one of the boards gave way and let him down all in a heap. Guess I'll go the other way."

He waited awhile so as to be sure that no one was watching him, and then stepping out carefully, made his way quickly into the house, returning thence, presently, and locking the door.

"I'm afraid you've roused the hull street," he said to Bragg, meeting him in the hall as he returned.

"You've got the young fellows?"

"One of 'em. He's in the cellar. It's the little 'un. T'other fellow got away."

"Why didn't you follow him? He'll have the police down on us in no time."

"Think so?"

"Certainly. He is a determined young scamp."

"Well, when they come they won't find nobody. It's getting dark now, and we can easily slide through the yard into the next street."

"Not until I have fixed the fellow down in the cellar, though?"

"Oh, you're going to fix him, are you?" asked the man, with a sort of half-smile on his face.

"Yes, with this," and Bragg tapped his hip-pocket.

"Oh! Well, I'd advise you not to make too much noise, for you might arouse the coppers."

"Let them come!" hissed Bragg. "They will only find they have come too late, as usual!"

CHAPTER XII.

HOW SAM FARED.

SAM awoke to find himself lying upon a bench in a damp, gloomy looking cellar, the beams overhead covered with moisture, and the whole place redolent of dirt and disease.

Over in one corner was a sort of skeleton staircase, a narrow hand-rail, supported by two ticklish looking slats, one at the top the other at the bottom, running along on the outer edge.

The steps were narrow and worm-eaten, and in one or two places the boards were not wide enough for the foot, one or two near the top being missing entirely.

A rough table near Tom's bench contained three tallow candles, stuck to the board by their own grease, and emitting very little light, of a sickly yellow kind, and a great deal of black, foul-smelling smoke.

"They've given me light, at all events," mused Sam, "though really it only serves to show how dark this wretched place is. Oh, what a splitting headache I've got!"

He pressed his hands to his burning forehead, and strove to recollect the incidents of the last few hours, for at first he could scarcely tell how he had got into the place.

"Oh, I remember," he said wearily, after thinking a few moments. "I hope that Chass got away, for he's a plucky fellow, and will bring help. I don't feel as if I could do anything now."

Presently he arose and went over to the stairs, but it needed not the placing of his foot upon the rotten steps, the grasping of the shaky rail in his hand to tell him the result of an attempt to ascend, for he could see this at a glance.

"They can't fool me, and I mean it," he muttered, his old-time vivacity coming back to him even in this place. "They'd like to fool me into going into that death-trap, but they'll have to try some one else."

Then he tried the lower door which he now perceived, but it was firmly secured upon the outside, and he could not even shake it.

"Oh, well, there'll be some one here before long, I take it," he muttered. "Those candles weren't put here for my benefit alone."

He had not long to wait, when he heard the sound of a key being turned in the lock, and in a moment the door was swung outward and he caught a glimpse of the sky.

It was dark and cloudy, and the air seemed cold and damp as though a storm were threatening.

In the few moments that the door was left open he heard a church clock strike and he began counting the strokes.

He had reached eight when the door closed with a bang and he lost the rest, for he knew it was much later than that by the silence outside.

"Oh, you needn't mind counting the clock," said a voice. "All hours are as one to you now, and it'll take more than a church bell to wake you up before a great while."

The nocturnal visitor was Bob Bragg, and Sam could see something bright and glistening in his hand.

"It's you, is it?" he said. "You must have known that I didn't care to see you."

"Cool as ever, eh?"

"You're a villain, Bob Bragg, and I mean it! but if you think you can frighten me you're out in your reckoning!"

"Take care, or——"

"Oh, you needn't show me what you have in your hand. I know what it is, and it only shows what a coward and bully you are to bring a revolver here when you well know that I am unarmed."

"You've taunted me all you're going to, Sam Sharpe, and now we'll have an end to it. Do you know that I am going to kill you?"

"I suppose that is what you came here for, but the other does not follow."

"It don't?" and Bragg laughed. "I'm going to shoot you, Sam. Perhaps you don't know how good a shot I am, but *I never miss my mark!*"

There were three candles burning on the rough table, as we have said, and, suddenly raising his arms without seeming to take any aim whatsoever, Bragg fired and snuffed one of them out.

"One," he cried.

Then in an instant he fired again, and out went a second candle.

"See! Two!"

The report had not ceased to reverberate through the gloomy place when the fellow cried:

"Now for the last."

Crack!

A flash, a puff of smoke, a sharp report, and out went the last candle leaving the place in total darkness.

"Three!"

Hardly had the word been uttered when Sam sprang at the villain, and seized him by the throat in a vise-like grasp; the wretch uttering a terrible oath and trying to throw off his assailant.

Crack!

Crack!

Crack!

The three remaining chambers were discharged, but Sam had thrown up the assassin's arm, and the bullets lodged in the beams overhead.

The plucky little fellow wrenched the weapon from his enemy's hand, and aimed a furious blow at his head with it.

The blow struck the man's arm, which he quickly interposed, and nearly paralyzed it.

Then he broke away from the enraged boy and made a dash for the door leading to the yard.

Sam was there first, and as the scoundrel rushed up he dealt him a blow in the face.

Suddenly a light appeared at the head of the flight of crazy, rotten stairs.

Bragg made a dash for them, and at one bound was half way up.

Sam sprang after him in an instant, and the two clenched in a death-like grip, an ominous creak sounding beneath them.

"Jump!" screamed a voice. "Jump, or you are a dead man. The stairs are falling."

CHAPTER XIII.

CHARLIE RETURNS—EXPLANATIONS—CONCLUSION.

CRASH!

Crash!

Rattle—rattle!

The wretched stairs, too frail and rotten to stand the sudden weight and the fearful strain put upon them, were indeed threatening to give way, even before the man above had spoken.

Snap!

The hand-rail broke in two and the pieces rattled down upon the stones below.

Then one of the steps gave way with a crash and the two boys, struggling fiercely, fell upon their knees.

Crack!

The board at the side became loosened and split in twain.

"Villain!" cried Sam, "you shall not escape me."

Crash!

Rattle!

"Cheese it!" yells the voice above, "the cops are coming in this very minute."

With an awful crash and rattle the crazy stairs fall in and in the midst of a cloud of dust and smoke, and masses of shivered wood-work and plastering, the two combatants fall to the ground, stunned and bruised, Sam on top, with his hand clutching fiercely at Bragg's throat.

"You infernal scoundrel!" he cried. "I've a good mind to thrash you, and I mean it. I'll give you something to remember me by at any rate."

With that he struck the contemptible coward a stunner on the eye which promised to give it a decidedly somber appearance.

"Don't hit a fellow when he's down," whined Bragg.

"That's your cry, is it? You wouldn't have taken advantage of me, would you?"

Then he suddenly pulled the fellow to his feet and holding him firmly by one hand, rained blow after blow upon his head and face with the other, giving him a decidedly damaged looking appearance.

"There! You ain't so good looking as you were, I'll bet," cried Sam, throwing the bully from him as though he had been some contagious object. "Hello, what's that?"

The outside door was suddenly thrown open and in rushed Charlie Brower and half a dozen policemen. At the same time lights appeared at the landing above and Bragg's villainous assistants were seen in the firm grasp of another party of the blue-coated guardians of the peace.

"Safe, thank Heaven!" cried Charlie, throwing his arms around Sam and laughing for very joy.

"Thanks to you, old man," returned Sam. "But I say, don't let that scoundrel there escape. Make him tell where my valise is. There are important papers in it."

"Curse you!" hissed the young villain. "You will never get it again. It has been destroyed with all its contents."

"Officer," said Sam, sternly, "this man has endeavored to take my life. I charge him with an attempt to kill. He'll get a lifer, I reckon."

"No, no!" screamed Bragg, now completely terrified, the touch of the officer's hand upon his collar seeming to unman him.

"Take him away!" cried Charlie. "This is not the first time he has attempted to kill my friend. Once he tried to poison him. Besides, I have a charge myself to make. He shot at me four times this afternoon. If he is hanged it will be no more than his just deserts."

"No—no!" yelled Bragg, growing hysterical. "Let me go and I will tell you where the papers are. I have got them hidden away. Don't let them hang me! don't—don't!"

"Stop your noise, you cowardly cur!" cried Sam. "It's

always a safe rule to consider a bully a coward, but you're worse. You're a mean, wretched, sneaking cur, and I mean it," and seizing the abject creature by the collar he shook him until his teeth chattered.

"Tell me where you have hidden those papers this minute, or I'll have you hanged as sure as my name is Sam Sharpe. Quick, now, or I'll choke it out of you!"

"In the second story, front," gasped the cringing wretch, "in the table-drawer. Curse you for this, Sam Sharpe! May all the——"

"Save your breath to cool your porridge," interrupted Sam, dryly, "and spare your curses for somebody who is afraid of them, I am not."

At this moment a cry of terror was heard from above.

"The house is on fire," yelled one of the policemen.

"The shooting must have caused it."

Whether this was so or not, it was certain that the flames had made great headway, for they suddenly broke out on the floor above, and the officers were obliged to run their prisoners outside in quick order.

Sam sprang out of the cellar, and dashed up-stairs with the speed of the wind, and burst into the room on the second floor, which Bragg had indicated.

His valise was lying upon the floor, and grabbing it up he made a hasty examination of its contents.

The precious documents were not there!

"Ah! I forgot—the drawer," he muttered, and tipping the table over he smashed in the drawer with one blow of his foot, and finding what he sought, thrust them into his inside pocket, and turned to the door.

The entire hallway was filled with smoke!

Like a monstrous wave the flames rolled towards him, and he fell back in dismay, and dashed for the window.

The rush of air drove back the flame and smoke, and at that moment a ladder was placed against the house, and Sam climbed out and began to descend as the fire once more swept toward him.

He had escaped, however, and in another moment he was safe, and felt his hand grasped by Charlie, who cried:

"Come away; that villain Bragg has escaped."

"But the others?"

"Taken away and locked up."

The two boys hurried from the scene, and the fire was soon extinguished, although the entire building was gutted from cellar to roof.

The other houses were saved, however, as they subsequently learned, the firemen having exerted themselves manfully, and prevented the flames from spreading.

Sam went at once with Charlie to Mr. Raymond's house, and here a new surprise awaited them.

The gentleman was dead, indeed, but the sad event had taken place that very day and not previously—as Sam had been informed by the lying telegram.

Mr. Raymond had been killed in the very accident which had delayed the two boys, and at the very moment when they heard the news of this disaster he was lying dead in a farm-house not far away.

An investigation of his affairs brought to light a will which nobody had supposed existed, and in this Sam was left not only the property which he expected to get, but nearly everything besides.

Then it was that Sam discovered that Bragg was related to the man, and he understood his schemes in an instant.

The fellow disappeared, and was not heard of for many years afterwards, when Sam, now a rich man, engaged in a profitable business, met him one day in the street, the fellow asking him for alms before he recognized who he was.

"Bob Bragg!" cried Sam. "So you have turned up again, have you? Your wickedness does not seem to have brought you prosperity."

The miserable creature, almost dead with consumption, clothed in rags and looking the very incarnation of abject misery, gazed in a frightened manner into Sam's face, recognized him, and with a wild cry, like that of a scared animal, hurried away and was lost in the crowd.

A few days afterwards Sam recognized his body in the Morgue, and claiming it, gave it a decent burial, which was perhaps more than the wretch deserved.

Sam did not return to Shady Dell after the death of his friend, but went abroad taking Charlie with him, and when he came back, having reached his majority, he went into business, and took Charlie as a partner.

Lawless and his fellow bullies are now scattered far and wide; the old school has long since been given up, and its existence is now but a memory, though there are a few who think of it with pleasure, and among them is a jolly, middle-aged gentleman, once the merry, plucky, fun-loving, fearless SAM SHARPE.

[THE END.]

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